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ABSTRACT

Of the 233 facilitators trained between August 1979 and January 1985 to introduce the /I/D/E/A/ Principals' Program to principals in their local areas, 206 completed a training program evaluation form. From this form the facilitator trainers obtained data concerning factors affecting the effectiveness of facilitator training programs. Ratings were computed for each of the elements of the training program as a whole, and the trainees' comments were examined individually in the context of the characteristics of the specific training sessions in which they participated. Differences between responses to the highest and lowest rated sessions indicated the value of establishing a climate of mutual trust and support, clarifying the overall nature of the program, and challenging participants to grow. The findings in general supported several conclusions about trainees' needs for preparation for training, understanding of program concepts, and clarification of the nature of the facilitator role. Trainers should be aware of trainees' adult learner characteristics, the style and climate of training sessions, the linkage between training events and objectives, the value of program evaluation, and the importance of adequate time and pacing. (PGD)

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FACILITATOR TRAINING FOR DEVELOPING PRINCIPALS' SUPPORT GROUPS

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ABSTRACT

Facilitator Training for Developing
Principals' Support Groups

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Evaluation feedback from 18 facilitator training sessions involving 233 trainees was analyzed to identify which training elements of the experiential training model were well received by the trainees. Then the extensive written comments, training agendas and notes, and the unique environmental conditions of each training session were reviewed for clues of what might be contributing to the relative success of the training element. These ideas were sorted and combined until generalization emerged to be tested against other plausible explanations. Suggestions for future training are included.

FACILITATOR TRAINING FOR DEVELOPING PRINCIPALS' SUPPORT GROUPS

The /I/D/E/A/ Principals' Program is a two-year program which focuses on professional development, school improvement, and continuous personal renewal, through the creation and maintenance of a collegial support group. A trained facilitator meets monthly with a group of eight-to-ten principals. Through a sequence of processes and group-generated activities based on the four anticipated outcomes, the collegial support group becomes a peer-review and resource panel.

The program was initiated in 1978-1979 when three groups of principals representing urban, rural, and suburban school systems engaged in a five month pilot program which tested many of the activites and basic assumptions incorporated into the program. Since the initial start, approximately 240 local facilitators have have been trained to implement the program with principals in their geographic areas. Over 2000 princpals in 27 states and three foreign countries have participated in the program.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the training of facilitators who implement the program with a group of principals in their local area. The assumption was that a facilitator could be trained in a relatively brief experience to implement the program with a group of local principals. The question of what the facilitator does after the training is very important but will not be the subject of this paper in that the focus is what we think we learned in the facilitator training program.

The facilitator training program is based upon an experiential learning model in which the participants experience some of the program processes, form training teams to assist members to analyze their learning and to practice their facilitating skills with a group of principals during a 2 and 1/2 day session. During the clinical session each facilitator is observed using the five-step clinical observation cycle. Finally, there is effort for each facilitator to develop their implementation strategy. The facilitator training session usually occurs in a geographic area where there is a core of facilitators and a group of principals available for the clinical portion of the training session.

The data for this analysis comes from an extensive feedback form collected at the close of the training. The feedback included a rating for the training session as a whole, a rating of various aspects of the training, and considerable written responses to probes asking for explanation or comments on their ratings. In addition to the evaluation feedback, records of agendas, trainers, and unique arrangements were reviewed.

There were 206 facilitators of the 233 people trained who completed the evaluation feedback form. These people were trained in 18 training sessions between August 1979 and January 1985. Table 1 is a list of the sites, the numbers involved at each site, and the overall ratings given the training session by the participants.

The mean ratings for each training element were computed and displayed in a frequency distribution. (Table 2 is the range of mean rating and overall mean for each of the training elements.) This display allowed the identification of the top and bottom clusters of ratings for each of the training elements. Then, the written comments, training notes, and unique aspects of the training sessions were reviewed for clues of what might have contributed to the respective ratings. The comments and other potential clues were noted on index cards so they could be easily sorted and combined in the search for generalizations which helped explain the ratings of the training by the participants. After all the notations were made, the cards were sorted and combined until generalizations emerged to be tested against other plausible explanations for the ratings.

Observations: Overall ratings.

The distribution of mean overall ratings allowed the identification of the top-rated training sessions and the bottom rated sessions. When the top five sessions were compared with the bottom four sessions, there were some differences in the content and the flavor of the comments made with the ratings. Those sessions rated higher had much more enthusiastic comments, more superlatives, and fewer suggestions for changes. The comments included ideas such as practicality, application, experiences, relationships with peers and trainers, a progression of learning from disbelief to commitment and accomplishment, challenge, support for growth and non-threatening climate and some kind of "ah ha" experience. By contrast, those sessions rated lower received comments which focussed on skills being developed and the organization and content of the program. Comments often were volunteered on aspects that should be changed. The generalization would be that the higher-rated sessions were those were able to establish the climate of mutual trust and support, where participants were challenged to grow, could see the application of what was being learned, and the desire to participate was increased. On the other hand, the bottom-rated group seemed to have less understanding of the program in its entirety and were concerned about content and skills to be used in implementation.

The identification of the top and bottom groups in each of the training elements corroborated the comments supplied with the overall ratings. That is, the top-rated sessions were also rated high in the training elements related to climate of the training, program rationale, inbasket problem solving, and motivation to implement. The bottom-rated sessions had fewer elements identified as being excellent and the comments seemed to be focussed on the observation cycle and the need for the success of the clinical session.

The following observations were prepared by comparing the comments made by participants in the top and bottom rated training sessions for each element. A frequency distribution of the mean ratings for each question was used to indentify the top and bottom rated training sessions. Natural breaks in the distribution were used to identify top and bottom groups for comparison. Therefore the number of sessions in each group could vary but an attempt was made to

keep the group as close as feasible to one-fourth of the total number of sessions. The observations represent themes which occurred in the omments. Following are the observations made for each of the training elements.

Training element: Climate conducive to sharing was created and supported.

This element was rated very high in all sessions. Both bottom and top sessions had comments pertaining to the contributions of trainers and participants to the climate. The top group seemed to focus on the developmental process involved and while the bottom group mentioned the people involved in the group as well as the process. Size of the group seems to related to climate in that the top group had an average size of 7.5 and the bottom group averaged 17 trainees. Another point to consider would be the extent to which participants have had previous experience and feels that he or she already knows the answer.

Training element: New perspectives or insights were generated.

The participants in top sessions indicated a wider range of insights than those in the bottom-rated sessions. Insights mentioned tended to cover the whole range of the training content including the rationale for the content or process in the total training package. Those in the bottom-rated sessions tended to focus on particular skills and events without relating them to the total program perspective or there were comments about the willingness of principals to engage in improvement efforts.

Training element: The four outcomes became clear and understandable.

There was little difference in the type of comments made by the participants in the top- and bottom-rated groups. Both acknowledged the need for more time and experience with the outcomes. Those who rated this element lower indicated they valued the outcomes but felt that working with a group of principals would add to their understanding. They also recognized the difficulty in getting others to understand the outcomes.

Training element: Group process skills were learned.

The difference in the reactions to the learning of group process skills were that those who gave it a higher rating were more comfortable, enjoyed the practice, and gained in perspective on why the skills were used. Those on the other end felt more emphasis was needed, the teaching may have been mismanaged, they needed more feedback, trainers were overly sensitive about hurting the feelings of participants, but their belief if the skills was reinforced and they wanted more work in the skills. Two of the bottom-rated sessions had trainers who may not have been comfortable with some of the skills being taught.

Training element: Rationale for collegial support became clear.

The top groups commented on experiencing it in the training team and watching it develop in the clinical group. They seemed to see the need and recognized the importance of the concept in the program, almost to the point that they equated the support group with being the program. The bottom groups intellectualized the need for the support group, also felt very positive about their experience but had some doubt that the concept could work in their setting or felt that they already did this through informal ways.

Training element: Peer observation cycle was used and particpants were confortable with it.

There was a distinct difference between the top and bottom groups in these areas due to a continually changing training strategy. The sessions where there were lower ratings were the earlier sessions where the observation cycle was introduced and then groups were left on their own to use the process. The groups reported it not being used, an unnecessary burden, little attention given it, and lack of involvement of the trainers. Later sessions had trainers insisting that the observation cycle be used and taking part in the sessions. Typically the trainer would lead the the first observation and be a part of subsequent observations. Comments of those who rated this high spoke of the support of the group, assistance of the trainer, and the need for more explanation and coaching on the process.

Training element: Too many facilitators were working on the training team.

Since the number of facilitators on each training team varied with the situation, this question has potential of providing insights into whether the number makes a difference. Comparisons of the top and bottom groups does does not indicate that a certain number is ideal. Those who said their team was okay pointed to the needed interactions, the harmony of the group, mutual support, division of labor, using member strengths, and the desire to conduct more activities. Those who said there may have been too many indicated some frustration with team members, making the best of the situation, the diversity and change of pace within the team. There is a possibility that the key to a good experience is the extent to which the training team was able to form a team prior to undertaking the clinical portion of the training session.

Training element: Understanding of the program by clinical participants.

The top groups indicated they completed the task, the principals had a good feelings and were cooperative, and they felt the principals understood but still had some questions. Those were in the bottom-rated sessions commented that more preparation and groundwork was needed, the principals came in vague but gained some understanding in the workshop, and perhaps they understood what was done but did not gain a perspective of the entire program.

Training element: Representative council was helpful.

The initial training model had a council of representatives who met with the trainers to provide feedback regarding concerns and to make decisions affecting the entire session such as how to divide up the principals coming in for the 2 and 1/2 day session. This device proved too cumbersome and unnecessary. There were other mechanisims for feedback and those decisions which were needed for coordination could be made quickly in the large group or by a task group set up for the specific issue. The formal representative council was eliminated.

Training element: In-basket problem solving was a source of assistance.

There was very little difference in the ratings on this item due to the concept being so accepted by participants. In sessions where the ratings were slightly lower, the training agenda had allowed the training teams to practice this without first experiencing it as a total group and this resulted in some confusion on the techniques ot be used.

Training element: Facilitators designed, implemented, and evaluated the inservice workshop for principals.

Those sessions which were rated higher had comments related to the excellent teamwork, understanding of individual styles, being able to use group skills, and appreciating the diversity of team members. Sessions which had lower ratings indicated team planning was difficult, some concern about working with peers, some domination by powerful team members, the need for mutual respect, and the desire to give more attention to the evaluation phase.

Training element: Need for more content in order to facilitate the program.

Those sessions where more content was needed had comments expressing the need for more time to understand what is available, the faith that there was enough to get started and that participants would provide content also. Those who did not feel more content was needed had more confidence in the notebook materials and in their ability to find their own material.

Training element: The facilitator has an implementation plan.

The top-rated training sessions were earlier training sessions and the comments were that the plans were all set because of prior preparations, the schedule for implementation was all set, that the there was a reasonable draft plan, or the plan was in process of being firmed up. Sessions which were rated lower were the later training sessions which were eight day training sessions as opposed to the earlier ten day model. The comments had to do with checking the commitment of the school system, the plan will be evolving, or that they hoped to have the plan before the end of the last meeting. This difference also reflects a change in the procedure to require that a facilitator have a group of committed principals prior to being

trained. In some of the later sessions, it may even be a possibility that persons being trained were viewing facilitator training as an inservice growth experience for themselves as much as it was training to implement the program with a group of principals.

Some generalizations about training facilitators

So, after reflecting on the feedback from eighteen training sessions along with agendas and unique aspects of the various sites, what do we think we know about the training of facilitators to implement support groups for the purpose of assisting principals in their individual professsional and school improvement efforts? The following ideas are offered as guides in the development of similar training models.

1. The experiential training model is a powerful training experience that creates awareness for the participants. The learning takes on additional meaning when it is an "ah ha" experience which reinforces success. However, the training model must provide the necessary preparation for the processing of the events if participants are to develop generalizations from their experience.

2. The gestalt of the entire program needs to be clarified perhaps even before participants experience parts of the program.

3. The concept of the facilitating role is difficult to envision, particularly for people who have been in teaching or authority roles and who are now going to work with a group of peers.

4. Facilitator trainees exhibit most of the characteristics of adult learners in spite of their already advance level of knowledge and skills. They are heterogeneous in background and experience, sensitive about self, have fears, are emotionally attached to own ideas, are impatient, need time, are busy, are concerned with concrete needs, need to be made to feel self-confident, and unsure due to past learning experiences.

5. The climate of the training session is an integral part of training facilitators to implement support groups. If the training does not model the support group concept, the training will be less effective.

6. The explication and frequent relating of training events to the training objectives assists trainees to focus on the whole process as opposed to isolated activities.

7. Professionals need skill development and practice in such elements as group skills, planning, consensus forming, etc.

8. Intellectual understanding and the ability to put into practice are both essential elements of the training process.

9. Key processes of the program must be modeled and/or considerable time and effort will be needed for clarification.

10. Planning for implementation is assisted by prior commitment to the concept by the school system and principals.

11. Task achievement and feedback are essential elements of training.

12. Adequate time and proper pacing of training events makes the difference between learning and just "going through another workshop."

We started with few assumptions about who could be trained as a facilitator. We wanted people who were committed to helping principals and who had some comfort with group processes. We have discovered that there is a lot of talent among educators that need to be given the proper context so it can be put to work on creating new mechanisms for the improvement of educational programs for children. That context is one which supports experiential learning and the constant search for improvement. We need to use more of the knowledge and skills that we have and we can do that only if there is a climate that enables us to learn from our experiences in a positive manner.

(Furthur information on the /I/D/E/A/ Principals' Inservice Progam can be obtained from /I/D/E/A/ , 259 Regency Place, Dayton, OH 45459 or by calling (513) 434-6969.)

James LaPlant
April 1985

TABLE I
Training Sites, Number of Participants
and Overall Ratings of Facilitators
Training Sessions, August 19 to January '85

Training Site	Date	No. Trained	Returns	Principals In Clinical	Mean Rating	Rank in Overall Rating
1. Colorado Springs	August '79	16	15	26	7.5	17
2. Colorado Springs	June '80	11	10	19	8.2	15
3. Lindeenwood	June '80	13	13	20	9.0	4
4. Penn State	June '80	13	11	20	8.7	9
5. Indianapolis	June '81	12	12	30	8.7	9
6. Millersville	June '81	8	8	20	9.1	2
7. Cincinnati	August '81	5	5	--	8.4	13.5
8. St. Louis	January '82	14	12	24	8.7	9
9. Lindenwood	June '82	9	7	28	9.0	4
10. Buffalo	August '82	24	17	22	7.4	18
11. Cincinnati	January '83	5	4	23	9.0	4
12. St. Paul	June '83	23	23	22	8.6	11.5
13. Albuquerque	June '83	20	16	20	8.9	6.5
14. Calgary	December '83	9	9	17	8.9	6.5
15. Louisville	January '84	12	12	18	8.0	16
16. Akron	June '84	8	8	12	8.6	11.5
17. Naperville	August '84	14	14	27	9.3	1
18. Akron	January '85	10	10	26	8.4	13.5
* Special Training		7	0	--	---	
Totals		233	206	374		

TABLE 2
Range and Mean Ratings Given
To Program Elements by Trainees

	Range of Mean Ratings	Overall Mean
1. Ratings of training as a whole	7.4 - 9.3	8.6
4. A climate conducive to sharing feelings & new ideas was created and supported.	4.4 - 5.0	4.8
5. New perspectives or insights were generated.	4.0 - 4.9	4.5
6. The four outcomes became clear and understandable.	3.8 - 4.8	4.4
7. Fundamental group process skills required by this inservice were learned and practiced.	3.8 - 5.0	4.5
8. The rationale for and meaning of collegial support became clear.	3.9 - 5.0	4.5
9. The peer observation cycle was formally used by a facilitator group.	2.0 - 4.8	4.1
10. Facilitators became comfortable with the observation cycle.	2.0 - 5.0	3.9
11. Facilitators practiced and received feedback on those skills initially identified as necessary for program.	3.5 - 4.6	4.2
12. There were too many facilitators working with our group of principals.	1.4 - 3.0	2.0
13. The principals involved during the training sessions understood the program.	2.8 - 4.9	4.3

14R.	Representative council in-basket	2.6 - 4.6	3.8
14I.	The in-basket problem solving technique is a source of professional assistance.	4.6 - 5.0	4.9
15.	Facilitators developed an understanding of and commitment to overall program rationale and design.	3.9 - 4.9	4.5
16.	Facilitators as members of a team designed, implemented, and evaluated the inservice workshop for principal participation.	3.9 - 5.0	4.6
17.	I now have a need for considerably more content material in order to facilitate the program.	1.9 - 3.8	2.6
18.	I now have an implementation plan for my local site which I am confident will be implemented successfully.	3.1 - 4.5	4.1
19.	My desire to be involved as a facilitator in the /I/D/E/A/ Principals' Inservice Program has been increased through participation in the facilitator training.	3.9 - 5.0	4.7